maxim that mere facts are the torturer's business, "whereas questions of justification ... are a matter for courts of law."[270] Cicero, like any member of Stalin's Politburo, had seen a few intrigues in his time; he'd witnessed the destruction of the Republic under Caesar's dictatorship, and knew that to survive he must pander and toady, which he occasionally did until a fatal paroxysm of courage overcame him; but under Stalin, both facts and justifications were determined in advance; the torturers *were* the law courts, and vice versa. Authority was no longer content with defending itself by violence; it justified each defense *from the lips of the victim*, so that no distinction could be drawn anymore between expediency and justice. And Trotsky's razor is partly to blame.

DEFENSE OF AUTHORITY AS SELF-DEFENSE

For me, at least, written ideas mean so much more if I can visualize the thinker who had them. I've seen photographs of Trotsky shaking a finger, the white beard wagging; of Trotsky's hands wide apart as he leaned back; of Trotsky throwing mash to his chickens, Trotsky fishing; Natalia's face beginning to be freckled with age, Natalia sniffing flowers but looking away. That was at the house in Coyoacán where Trotsky was assassinated. I went there in 1992. Coyoacán means the Place of Coyotes. It was once its own town. Now Mexico City has rushed all around it. Within this Atlantis, Trotsky's fortress of a house, like some of his ideas, still holds on. In the walled garden, a red flag still flies over Trotsky's grave. There it is, his slab of concrete, heavy and solid like one of his books; and upon it is graven just his name and the hammer and sickle. Around the tomb runs more concrete, and then that heavy thick-walled block of a house, with its parquet floors and narrow skylight, its slits through which the blue clouds go rushing.

So this was the place where the razor of terror finally caught him, I remember thinking. What had it been like for him living in that place with Natalia, the second wife, the true wife? Did he know, or did he hope? Maybe Stalin would die, illegitimate authority (that is, authority from which he'd been excluded) would be ended, the assassination called off, although in 1940 Hitlerism was at the zenith, and Trotsky might have feared that Stalin's death might be even more detrimental to the revolution than Stalin's life. Was it worse living there and waiting than it had been on the occasion of his very first arrest back in the days of the Tsar? Trotsky had been a boy then; how could he not have been afraid? And now? When I stay in a dangerous place long enough, I get numb; I develop other worries. Was it like that for him? Lev Davidovich and Natalia Trotsky were human beings. They left behind them the desiderata of human beings, the skeletons of their small passions and routines—more moving, somehow, than any number of photographs of Trotsky's goatee and pince-nez, which were what I remembered more than his face, more than his eyes; Trotsky was not even his real name, unless real names are those we choose.

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Artifacts, then: Natalia's bow, eyeglasses, a gilt-framed painting of a sailing ship at sunset, the bed with the Mexican quilt, Natalia's hatbox, Trotsky's boots, bathrobes in the closet, the bedroom with the bulletholes in it, steel casements, the small bed with red colors, grey irregular funnels of bulletholes in the yellow walls. Stalin's agents hadn't succeeded that time. ("We sent him into exile," recalls Molotov serenely. "And even then we had a lot of trouble with him. While living abroad he actually called for terror... As long as imperialism's alive, there will be many such swine.")[271] Every passage in the concrete was so narrow that one could barely squeeze through it. This is how it also felt to me when I read Trotsky's books. Everything is scientific, proven, perfect; the passage takes me this way because it is the only way to go; the razor of terror will never slip. But Stalin and Molotov had taken up the razor now, and so Trotsky had become the tenth man. The goal shines. The goal cannot be compromised. The goal is Trotsky's grave.

Trotsky's house in Mexico

This is the place where he wrote his brilliant exposés of Stalin's show trials, his arrogant cruelty transmuted into stubborn self-defense: no more repression now, only inspiration. Long ago, in one of his speeches during the October Revolution—a mendacious one, since it promised land to the peasants—he'd cried out (for an eyewitness reported that among his working class audience sat "not a few typical petty bourgeois figures, male and female"):

> The Soviet government will give everything the country has to the poor and to the soldiers at the front. You, bourgeois, own two coats? Give one to the soldier freezing in the trenches. You have warm boots? Stay at home. Your boots are needed by a worker...
>
> Because these things were requested, not yet demanded, the eyewitness reported that "the mood around me verged on ecstasy."[272]

In 1940 he could still affect people a little; he could still invoke justice when he described the hideous crimes of Stalin...

Look: here is the bathtub, the pitcher beside it, Natasha's hexagonal mirror, a red bottle of Colgate toothpaste (they didn't use tubes in 1940). Out the steel casemented double window there is a fine view of a high wall with vines on it. I didn't look to see if there were any other bulletholes. A hardbound book at the bedside where husband and wife once slept. And here was the study where the ice-pick caught him. The bookcases had been glassed. What reified thoughts did they contain? Lenin in Spanish, of course, red, XIX volumes, Trotzky himself, so-spelled, the *Obras* and a *Libertad y Revolucion*, a two-volume Kant in blue, a white two-volume Hermann Stegemann, *Der Krieg*, yes, an ocean-blue Lenin in Russian, a red Lenin in

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Russian; he must have missed Lenin so much if his memoirs are true, felt so alone. (One biographer speculates that Stalin, on the other hand, was relieved when Lenin died, because the latter's antipathy to Stalin's illegitimate use of authority couldn't be found out anymore, and because now he could identify with Lenin more than ever.)[273] Here was the corner bed where he used to snooze, the work table, magnifying glass, inkwell, letter opener, pencils, candles, the tiny desk calendar, *Izvestiya* and *Pravda* spread out on the back table next to a map of Mexico; he always liked to study the local situation. I saw his old dictaphone, the octopus cord from the typewriter, his Ediphone, globe, then more books: Bernard Clare, Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Jack London's *Martin Eden* (one of the saddest novels I've ever read), the collected works of London; and Dos Passos, naturally: *The Big Money*, parable of Trotsky's America. Then *Recent Social Trends*, not so recent in my day; Hailey's *An American Survey*, pale volumes of the *Novui Djurnal*...

Bakunin, who would have been no friend of Bolshevism had he lived into our century, wrote very acutely that in bourgeois society we are connected to one another by our material needs, not by our moral strivings. I need what your labor produces; I don't need your goodness to help me be good. Therefore, since your ethical condition does not affect mine, my relation to you must be one of exploitation.[274] Whether I buy my bread from you (and thereby infinitesimally help to save you from bankruptcy) or from someone else, my degree of goodness will remain the same. Therefore, I'll try to buy the cheapest bread I can, without worrying about any effect which that might have on you, especially since I don't know you. If the money I pay goes not to you, but to some master who enslaves you, and thereby seals your slavery, why then, in my ignorance and atomized indifference I'll go right on buying your bread. If you can make more money selling bread elsewhere, then that is what you'll do, even though that leaves me alone with useless money and no sustenance. This is the evil of the so-called "cash nexus."[275] This is one of the social ailments which revolutionaries, among them Trotsky, have sometimes risen up to prevent. (Trotsky with approving drollness quotes Herzen as accusing "his friend Bakunin of invariably in all his revolutionary enterprises taking the second month of pregnancy for the ninth. Herzen himself was rather inclined to deny even in the ninth that pregnancy existed." Trotsky of course never made mistakes).[276] What Trotsky's revolution created was a society which strove to be moral but which in so doing wrapped everybody in ruthless tendrils of exploitation which came from the top down: I need what your labor produces. I also need you to be good as I define goodness. And I need to shoot you, because you are the tenth man. Tell me, please, that this is not exploitation.

And here is Natalia's rolltop desk with shells and corals perched upon its headless shoulder. Here crouches the secretary's little typewriter.[277] It was her lover who killed Trotsky. He was made a Hero of the Soviet Union for it. And what did the secretary think then about the razor of terror? Did she understand that it cuts both ways?

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Milovan Djilas, who was Tito's Trotsky, once wrote an article calling for more severity in the sentencing of some small-time crook. "From the standpoint of ideology and revolutionary morality, I was right," he recalled after being purged, "but the consequences for order and legality were catastrophic."[278] This dichotomy explains a great deal. Revolutionary authority is not the same as consolidated authority. Trotsky, Stalin, Lenin, Tito, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Pol Pot and all the others, having made a revolution, wanted to continue it. They did not see, or did not care, that what may be moral in seizing power may not be in exercising it. Or, as the Unabomber framed the issue: "it is in the interest of the system to bring human behavior under control to the greatest possible extent."[279]

David: Marat expliant

The concrete hall angles down to the courtyard. I recall the long prison hallway in Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon*, down which the Old Bolshevik, Rubashov, will be led. The executioner will walk behind him. At some moment that only the executioner knows, the pistol will speak to the nape of Rubashov's neck. (Trotsky was not responsible for the show trials, as I've said. He was a decade out of power then. He'd only shot every tenth man. The head of state had not yet made police torture against class enemies "obligatory."[280] Well, come to think of it, in the twenties, when Trotsky was still a big man, there'd been show trials, too. "Denunciation is an elementary duty of every Party member, and a test of loyalty... Denunciation is a scientifically fostered epidemic.")[281] Trotsky has no power here, and only the authority of words; he's but a hyperintellectual jailbird in this vinegrown house of concrete and brick—gratings over the windows which reflect the trees like black ponds, a humid smell of ferns and flowers, vines over the doors, a window with diamonds shining.

If only there were a law that the terrorist must get to know his intended victim first! Maybe Trotsky's magnifying glass would speak to the assassin. Wasn't that part of Bakunin's point, that in bourgeois society we didn't know each other? —No good—Trotsky and Stalin knew each other quite well. They hated one another for both personal and categorical reasons. The bourgeois sex-murderer likewise often knows his victim and has all the opportunity he wants to hear her pleas; they only excite him. In medieval and post-medieval Europe, supposed witches and their accusers lived in the same small towns.[282] The revolutionary interrogator and torturer gets to know his victim, sometimes over a period of months or years.[283] An oppositionist is an *enemy,* Stalin's daughter learned: "And when 'the facts' convinced my father that someone he knew well had turned out 'badly' after all, a psychological metamorphosis came over him... Once he accepted the premise that X was his enemy, the premise became axiomatic, and no matter what the facts might be, they had to be made to fit."[284] This is the flaw in Merleau-Ponty's argument. *By virtue of its own assumption of infallibility through future justification, revolutionary authority cuts itself off from any check or correction, and so operates increasingly in a moral and logical vac-*

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uum. Stalin's daughter goes on: "He was accustomed by this time to having the [train] stations empty and cleared for his arrival and to the roads he traveled on being empty."[285] Who now would tell him he was wrong? Many people had the nerve to tell Trotsky just that, but remember his righteousness, his separate dining facilities at Brest-Litovsk. How could he ever separate the personal from the political? Nor did he ever express pity for the millions murdered for the sake of collectivization.[286]

Perhaps he mellowed in his exile. In the biography of Stalin that he was working on when he died (the editor tells us that some of the manuscript sheets were rendered illegible by his blood and brains), he dreamed his way back to the Civil War for two chapters, and in them admitted that all too many of the political commissars appointed to oversee the Tsarist officers failed treat the officers with simple decency. Then "friendship was out of the question, and the hesitating officer was finally inclined toward the enemy of the new régime."[287] Why had friendship been out of the question? — Perhaps on account of Trotsky's own prescriptions. In 1918 he had told the Central Executive Committee: "Next to every specialist there should stand a commissar, one on the right and another to the left, revolver in hand."[288] He never possessed many illusions about the ultimate loyalty of those officers to Communism, but by 1940 he had begun to recognize that compromise and empathy might actually be expedient in politics from time to time. Still he defended authority, clinging to his principles.

Trotsky assassinated

In the same unfinished work we find an allegorical fragment: Trotsky is trying to secularize Dostoyevsky's astounding parable of the Grand Inquisitor.[289] He particularly considers the end, when Christ listens well to the Inquisitor's evil expediencies, then gently kisses his lips. No good, no good, says Trotsky; Lenin would have spat in his eye! There's Trotsky for you. And on the facing page, with no sense of irony, Trotsky describes a meeting between Stalin and his crony Budu Mdivani from the Caucasus. Comrade Mdivani is trying to persuade Stalin that unless some common ground is found with the Opposition, the Party must suffer convulsions without end. Stalin, "after impressively stalking away to a far corner, ... turned, walked in silence toward Mdivani. His muscles tense, rising on tip toes and raising one arm, he stopped short. 'They must be crushed,' he cried in a dreadful voice. Mdivani said he was simply frightened."[290] Kissing enemies wasn't on Stalin's docket; that was for sure...

Stalin had already tortured and executed Trotsky's son Sergei Sedov by then.[291] His son Lev Sedov had just died in a Paris hospital, evidently with NKVD assistance.[292] —But still, what if Stalin and Trotsky could still somehow have reached a point of mutual toleration? Is that too much to ask? No good, no good; here's Molotov again, talking about the People's Commissar of Agriculture: "Iakovenko. I trained him. He was from western Siberia. Later he turned out to be a right-winger."

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—"Was he repressed?" asked the interviewer, meaning: Did he get Trotsky's reward? —"I don't remember," says Molotov. "Who cares? ... You can't remember everything."[293] —It's only to the rest of us that the artifacts matter: the red flag, the guardhouse, the kitchen's high windows—a prison, all right, but there's a leather lampshade in the doorway to Trotsky's study (step over the lintel, please)—the old gate, more brick behind it, more wall on top of the old wall... Clouds over the walls, the greenpainted henhouse, the walk lined with stones, trees and grass and wall, all around...

When Is Political Assassination Justified?

The moral calculus of Tolstoy, ca. 1890[294]

Never. "It is not necessary to kill [Tsars] Nicholases and Alexanders, ... but only to leave off supporting the social condition of which they are the product." Of course, he supported their murder in the end.

The moral calculus of Alexander Berkman, following President McKinley's assassination, 1901[295]

1. When directed "against a real and immediate enemy of the people," understood as such by the people—in which case it is a justified act of propaganda.
2. When directed "against a real and immediate enemy of the people," understood as such by the people, or not—in which case it is "exclusively an act of [expedient] terrorism."

"In Russia, where political oppression is popularly felt, such a deed would be of great value. But the scheme of political subjection is more subtle in America. And though McKinley was the chief representative of our modern slavery, ... the real despotism of republican institutions is far deeper and more insidious, because it rests on the popular delusion of self-government and independence... as such, it cannot be reached with a bullet. In modern capitalism, exploitation rather than oppression is the real enemy of the people... Hence the battle is to be waged in the economic rather than the political field. It is therefore that I regard my act [against the strikebreaker Henry Clay Frick] as far more significant and educational than Leon's [against McKinley]."

The moral calculus of Che Guevara, ca. 1960[296]

Rarely, but at the vanguard's discretion. "We sincerely believe that terrorism is of negative value... On the other hand, attempts to take

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